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The Court of Honor in the Peony Realm

By LEE R. BONNEWITZ

Twenty-four years ago, in June, 1916, I attended my first National Peony Show which was held in New York City and the memory of the blooms I saw in that show bring very pleasant thoughts to me today. LE CYGNE, THERESE, PHILIPPE RIVOIRE, JUBILEE, SOLANGE and KELWAY'S GLORIOUS were then the rising stars in the peony world. But that little show of long ago would fill a very small corner of our 1940 National Peony Show.

This great show was held in the air-conditioned Mayo Civic Auditorium in the city of Rochester, Minnesota, on Saturday and Sunday, June 22nd and 23rd. It undoubtedly was the greatest peony show ever held anywhere and it has made a mark of achievement which it will be very hard for any future show to excel. The fact that the auditorium was air-conditioned preserved the flowers in such fine condition that when I left the auditorium at eight P. M. on Sunday evening the show was still very beautiful.

For the benefit of future exhibitors, the persons responsible for the complete success of this show should write a carefully prepared article telling all of the plans which were so successfully carried out.

The object of this folder is to tell you of some of the winning varieties and especially those which occupied the **COURT OF HONOR**, an elevated exhibition place in the center of the hall against a background of evergreens. There were, I believe, eight varieties exhibited in that **COURT OF HONOR** and the seven members of the Peony Society who exhibited them had great reason to be proud of the exalted station which their blooms occupied.

★ A. B. Franklin

One grower, L. R. Fischer, whom I did not have the pleasure of meeting, was fortunate enough to have two of his blooms selected from the thousands of exhibition blooms as winners of the highest honors in the show. He exhibited in the **COURT OF HONOR** a very large

and very beautiful white variety, A. B. FRANKLIN, originated by Mr. Franklin himself and this exhibit won for him the Boyd Memorial Prize as "the most distinguished exhibit" in the whole show.

★ Victoire De La Marne

He also won the honor of having "the best red double peony" in the show with the very largest red peony I have ever seen. The variety was VICTOIRE DE LA MARNE which personally I had never regarded as a prize winning variety, but the bloom shown by Mr. Fischer was of enormous size, good shape, splendid form and with a better color than I had ever seen in it before. I will pay far more attention to this variety in the future for the peony world certainly does need a better showing of good red varieties. I hope to meet Mr. Fischer in our next National Show.

★ Mrs. J. V. Edlund

The peony, MRS. J. V. EDLUND, white, originated by Mr. Edlund, was awarded the distinction of being "the best peony exhibited in this show by any amateur." MRS. EDLUND is in the class of the very best white varieties and there are points of similiarity between it and ELSA SASS and JUDGE SNOOK which are all three in my list of the world's best varieties. I hope next year to see a row of each of these three varieties all growing in my garden side by side so that I may form my own judgment of which of them is really the best. The fortunate owner of this winning variety was Mr. Carpenter whom I hope to meet at the next peony show in Syracuse, New York.

It would have been a pleasure to meet every exhibitor in this show, but I am quite sure that not one member of the society was fortunate enough to meet all of them.

★ Nick Shaylor

L. W. Lindgren had a right to feel very proud when he saw the variety NICK SHAYLOR which he had grown in his own garden placed in the **COURT OF HONOR** as "the best pink variety exhibited in the show". I was very glad myself to see this distinction come to this particular variety which is a very, very light pink which almost fades into a cream white. In a recent National Peony Show it nearly reached the pinnacle of fame

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(best flower in the show) and in this very much larger show a much greater number of people were afforded the opportunity of seeing its beauty and appreciating its quality.

★ Martha Bulloch

The next variety which was placed in the **COURT OF HONOR** was **MARTHA BULLOCH**, pink, a Brand variety, but this particular bloom was grown by Mr. A. B. Franklin and it was adjudged "the very best flower in the whole show". This award undoubtedly pleased two of my very best friends, Mr. Brand for it was his origination and Mr. Franklin for it was a bloom from his garden.

★ President Lincoln

The next **COURT OF HONOR** variety was a new single Peony with two rows of very large petals of excellent quality showing a rich dark red color. This variety was placed in the **COURT OF HONOR** because it was "the best single peony" (meaning one which has only one, two, or three rows of petals). Both its size and color were excellent and I am glad that Mr. Brand who originated and grew this particular peony selected the name **PRESIDENT LINCOLN** for it. It will be growing in many of our gardens in the near future.

★ Tamate Boku

The two following varieties, the last in the **COURT OF HONOR**, however, gave me more thrills than all the other six combined. One of them, the outstanding gem or jewel of the entire **COURT OF HONOR** was an old, old variety which I myself imported in 1916 and for which I paid Mr. Dessert in France only \$2.00 and yet that variety, after twenty-four years in our gardens and shows, has risen in price from \$2.00 so that in the year 1937 I found it listed in eleven different catalogues at prices ranging from \$7.00 to \$15.00. The name of this variety is **TAMATE BOKU**, a pink and yellow Japanese variety of pure pink and pure yellow. I believe that a greater per cent of pure yellow is found in this bloom than in any other peony in our gardens. It is a very slow grower and a very late bloomer but an absolutely perfect landscape variety. I have, I believe, over one hundred plants of it, two or more years old, and at the end of

the season I found, I believe, only seven plants which were damaged in any manner by the wind and weather. Its blooming season occupies a full week and it is, I believe, as near 100% as any peony in the world. It is an outstanding exhibition flower, a perfect landscape variety, and as displayed in a vase in the home it attracts the attention of all visitors. This wonderful TAMATE BOKU was exhibited by my friend, William Anderson, of White Beak Lake, Minnesota, and I am glad that this prize winner was not the only one which he exhibited in this, the greatest of all peony shows. Place your order with him for this most valuable variety. He certainly has vigorous, true to name stock.

★ Dorothy J.

The other one of the two thrill-giving varieties in the **COURT OF HONOR** was named DOROTHY J. I found it immediately on my entrance into the auditorium and I could not leave it for it was beautiful beyond any peony I had ever seen. I called all of my friends to come and see its beauty and it immediately had its own audience. The blooms were very large with the superb quality of the very best ALICE HARDINGS I ever saw. The color was a deep rich cream with a faint suggestion of pink upon petals which were of great substance. When I was told that this particular vase of flowers was brought to the show by Dorothy Jones, daughter of R. H. Jones of Peru, Indiana, and that neither Dorothy herself nor her father nor mother had ever exhibited at a National Peony Show I was surprised indeed.

I was not long in finding Dorothy herself and I told her that her flowers would undoubtedly be winners in the show and I immediately expressed my faith in my judgment by giving her an order for a root of it at twenty-five dollars.

When I later found that she had brought additional blooms of this variety we discussed the advisability of exhibiting them in two separate classes. Three blooms were exhibited in class number 106 for the Home Achievement Medal for "the most worthy new peony." She also made an entry of three of the blooms in the seedling class and when I tell you that she won a silver medal on this variety as a seedling and the American Home Achievement Medal in its class you can see what

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a wonderful report she had for her father who was the originator of the variety. I am quite sure that no exhibitor in all the history of the American Peony Society ever made such a winning record on one variety in his first National Peony Show. Think of it—Home Achievement Medal, Silver Medal in Seedling Class, and three blooms of it in the **COURT OF HONOR**.

But not one-tenth of the varieties which won prizes were exhibited in the **COURT OF HONOR** and I know of no keener enjoyment than discovering new varieties of peonies which have a particular point of beauty in color, in form, or substance which have not been found in any of the varieties exhibited in former peony shows. I spent much enjoyable time with many different friends discussing the quality and beauty of peonies some of which I had never seen before and some of which I was very glad to purchase for my own garden.

At the age of seventy-three I am experiencing the same thrills of enthusiasm in the peony world which I experienced at my first peony show twenty-four years ago. I am just now finding a new field of usefulness for myself as a peony grower. When I sent out my first price list in 1920, two decades ago, my very first sale was for one MRS. EDWARD HARDING at \$100.00 and during the first two weeks in which that little price list was in circulation I sold five MRS. EDWARD HARDING at \$100.00 each, one MARY WOODBURY SHAYLOR at \$50.00, three KELWAY'S GLORIOUS at \$40.00 each, six JUBILEE at \$25.00 each, three LE CYGNE at \$25.00 each, two STANDARD BEARER at \$25.00 each, one CHERRY HILL at \$25.00, six PHILIPPE RIVOIRE at \$20.00 each, two FRANCES SHAYLOR at \$20.00 each, and other varieties at correspondingly high prices.

But during the past years since the depression of 1929, I have not sold a single root of any variety of peony at \$100.00, or \$50.00, or \$40.00, or \$25.00, or even \$20.00. I have found that my customers do not have the income nor resources to buy large three to five eye divisions of the new, the rare and the higher priced varieties.

My sales during the months of August and September last year were so discouraging that I almost gave up the idea of continuing in the peony business. But during the very last week in September the idea came to me

to offer the most beautiful and expensive varieties of peonies in small size divisions at prices much less than 3 to 5 eye division prices. So I immediately issued a price list on one eye divisions and I am glad to tell you that my sales during the months of October and November (usually the smallest of the four peony selling months) nearly doubled the amount sold in August and September and I was so very busy shipping peonies that I did not get time to plant my own divisions for the coming season. These I kept over winter in a basement and planted them early this spring.

One Eye Divisions

With the enthusiasm given to me by the experience of October and November last year, I will this year and probably for the rest of my business life specialize upon the sale of small divisions of the newest and best peonies at lower prices and this leaflet is being sent to many persons who are not now upon my mailing list.

If you would like to begin a collection of some of the highest quality peonies in small divisions at very moderate prices, I will be glad indeed to place your name upon my mailing list.

To be happy in your peony experience, I suggest that you interest a friend living at some distance from your home. Then with that friend agree upon the purchase of ten or twenty or even fifty new varieties, and only one root of each kind. You should divide these new divisions between you so that neither of you have a variety which is in the other's garden. This will give each of you an incentive to visit the other's garden in the blooming season and these visits are events to be remembered and discussed during the other eleven months of the year.

I know of no greater joy than the time I spend visiting my friends in their gardens and in entertaining them in my own. For over thirty years I have been visiting peony gardens here in the United States and in France and England and I hope that in the last years of my life I may be permitted to make my annual garden visits in the peony blooming season.

THE BONNEWITZ PEONY GARDENS

LEE R. BONNEWITZ, Owner

VAN WERT, OHIO

(The correct address of the grower of TAMATE BOKU,
found on page 4, is "White Bear Lake, Minnesota")

